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Lincoln

THE GRANGE
OVERBROOK, PA.

Walter Fayon Esq
Lexington Mass.

My dear Sir,

You wrote me some time since about the Walter Rogers Francis' Composite Photograph of Shakespeare, about which I could tell you nothing satisfactory. I now have the pleasure of telling you that the Walter Francis'

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THE JESSICA LETTERS

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Composite Photography

Applied to the Portraits of Shakespeare

By WALTER ROGERS FURNESS

In Mr. Francis Galton's interesting "Inquiries into Human Faculty" there is a chapter on what is termed "Composite Photographs," by which name is designated the final photograph obtained from the exposure to the same sensitized plate of a series of human faces. A photograph thus "composed" presents, according to Mr. Galton's ingenious theory, the face typical of the group. It was while reading this chapter that the idea occurred to me of trying, by a similar process, to obtain a typical portrait of Shakespeare.

It is not to be supposed that I felt at all sanguine of obtaining a satisfactory result. The essential element for success, namely, identity of position in the originals, was not to be counted on; all that I could hope for from this somewhat fanciful experiment would be, if there be any truth at all in Mr. Galton's theory, a reflex, very shadowy at best, of the most characteristic features in the alleged portraits of Shakespeare. At any rate, the experiment seemed worth trying, and if it satisfies no one it has at least interested me.

Under the guidance of my father, (Dr. H. H. Furness) and of Mr. Norris, the best living authority on the portraits of Shakespeare, to both of whom I here gladly express my affectionate and respectful thanks, I selected nine portraits supposed to have the best authenticated pedigrees, including the Stratford bust and the death mask. In six of these the face is turned to the left of the spectator, at nearly the same angle; in the remaining three it is turned in an opposite direction.

The first step was to reduce these portraits, by photography, to the same size. That size was determined by the distance, in exactest measurement, between the eyes and the mouth. The photographs thus obtained were attached to a board by four pins, with the eyes and mouths superposed as accurately as possible by adjustment in a frame across which were stretched two intersecting fine silk threads, one passing horizontally through the line of the eyes, the other vertically through the centre of the forehead and the middle of the upper lip.

Upon exposing each portrait of the first group to the sensitized plate for the same number of seconds, namely three, I found that the more marked outline of the Stratford bust unduly predominated, not so much from the character of the features themselves, as from the fact that the photograph was a reproduction of a statue; and conversely the Chandos portrait, dim and dark, failed to express itself in the composite. I was therefore obliged to apportion the exposure to the sensitized plate, allotting four seconds to the Chandos portrait, two seconds to the Stratford bust, and three seconds to each of the other four portraits.

For the like cause in the second group it was found, on trial, that one and one half seconds had to be given to the death mask, and seven seconds to each of the other portraits.

Merely by way of experiment, three minor composites were made by combining in pairs those portraits which seemed to bear to each other the closest resemblance, viz., the Chandos and the Jansen; the Chandos and the Droeshout; the Felton portrait and the Stratford bust.

My thanks are due to the skill and experience of Mr. W. Curtis Taylor.

I cannot but think that the photographs on the following pages reveal a similarity of likeness running through portraits which at first sight present a quite dissimilar character.

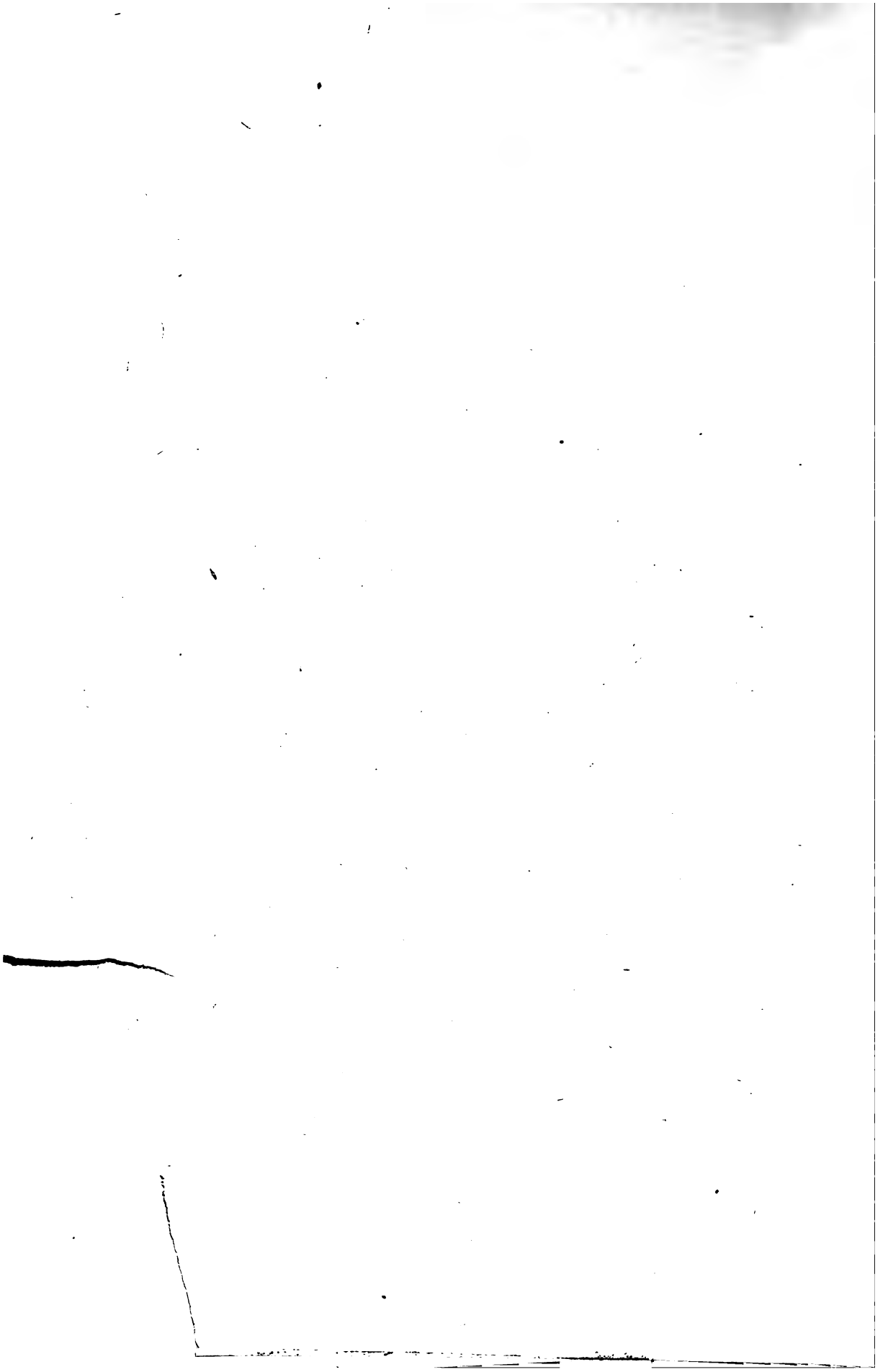
COMPOSITE PORTRAIT
CHANDOS, DROESHOUT, JANSEN, STRATFORD, FELTON, BUST

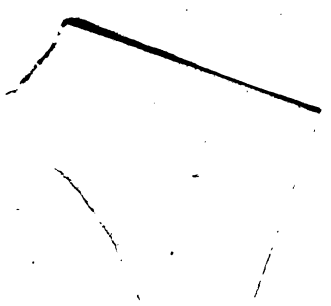
COMPOSITE PORTRAIT
OF THE CHANDOS AND THE JANSEN PORTRAIT

COMPOSITE PORTRAIT
OF THE CHANDOS AND THE DROESHOUT PORTRAITS

COMPOSITE PORTRAIT
OF THE FELTON PORTRAIT AND THE STRATFORD BUST

COMPOSITE PORTRAIT
MARSHALL'S DROESHOUT, ASHBOURNE, DEATH MASK





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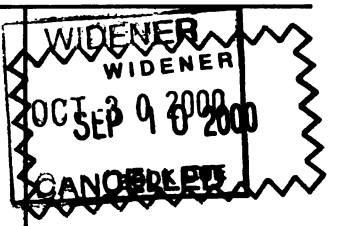

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